A Study of Key Communicators in Urban Thailand
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Source: *Social Forces*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Dec., 1966), pp. 192-199
Published by: Oxford University Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2574389
Accessed: 15/06/2014 05:42

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tive closeness of the municipal bodies to these communal conflicts. Furthermore, while friendship patterns are influenced by partisan affiliations, neither caste nor party dominates in the allocation of prestige. Rather, prestige is distributed with due consideration of caste and partisan antagonisms, but also with considerable regard for the leadership skills and the personal qualities which particular individuals have exhibited within the corporations.

Given the limitations of the techniques employed, it was not possible to specify the "third dimension" of our discussion with great precision. We suggested that socioeconomic status by itself was not a sufficient explanation, but that much depends on the personal skills and apparent motivations of each person.

An enquiry into the dimensions of intra-corporation relationships which concludes on such an ambiguous note might appear to be a negative report. Instead, the very finding that obvious categories of social and political life in India do not dominate the thinking of local political actors suggests the extent to which India has succeeded in becoming a functioning democracy.

A STUDY OF KEY COMMUNICATORS IN URBAN THAILAND*

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ABSTRACT

Who are the key communicators in urban Thailand? This study identifies them on the basis of 363 interviews in four major cities by education, age and occupation. In decreasing order, key communicators were monks, professionals, military men, government officials, teachers and merchants. Out of a list of characteristics of key communicators the most critical ones were education, heavy exposure to the mass media (especially the printed media), and responsible roles in word-of-mouth communication. The Thai findings were compared with studies of other societies, and major communalities that characterized activists in the communication network were identified.

According to the traditional view, mass media communications directly influence the individual listeners and readers. Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet in their study, *The People's Choice,* found it necessary to postulate a "two-step flow" hypothesis of communication. They argued that "ideas often flow from radio and print to opinion leaders and from these to the less active sections of the population."[1] As Katz suggested, the "image of the audience as a mass of disconnected individuals hooked up to the media but not to each other could not be reconciled with the idea of a two-step flow of communication implying, as it did, networks of interconnected individuals through which mass communications are channeled."[2]

The two-step hypothesis led to a good deal of inquiry into the characteristics and functions of the "opinion leader." Katz broke the hypothesis down into three major ingredients:

* The viewpoints expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints, expressed or implied, of The American University, or the State University College.

[1] Paul F. Lazarsfeld, B. Berelson, and M. Gaudet, *The People's Choice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), p. 151.

[2] Elihu Katz, "The Two-Step Flow of Communication: An Up-to-Date Report on an Hypothesis," *Public Opinion Quarterly,* 21 (1957), pp. 61-67.

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(1) the effectiveness of personal influence, (2) the flow of personal influence, via opinion leaders, and (3) the special receptivity of opinion leaders to the mass media.[3] Rogers and Cartano define "opinion leaders" as "individuals who exert an unequal influence on the decision of others . . . those individuals from whom others seek advice and information."[4] Many studies have used various terms which are more or less equivalent to "opinion leaders" such as "leaders," "informal leaders," "information leaders," "adoption leaders," "influentials," "gatekeepers," and others; which were related to their particular research problems and methodologies.[5]

THE PROBLEM

The aim of this paper is to examine communications in Thailand, a developing nation, as an interlocking network of mass media and persons, which follows the Katz-Lazarsfeld model of the communication process. More specifically, the research reported in this paper sheds light on communications in Thailand by identifying and describing those persons who are key communicators in their society.[6] We define key communicators as those individuals who have ready access to information from the mass media, who have an interest in foreign news, who consider themselves advice-givers and reliable sources of news, and who are in a position to transmit news to others.

From an examination of the literature on Thailand, we selected six occupations as the ones most likely to have these characteristics in the Thai society. We then proceeded to seek answers to two general questions. (1) Among the occupations studied, which ones fulfill the definition of key communicator most adequately according to the empirical data? (2) What are the relative contributions of certain demographic variables, mass media variables, and word-of-mouth variables to key communicative behavior?

Before proceeding with the development of the study in Thailand, one should indicate that much parallel research has been accomplished in the United States and some in other parts of the world.[7]

To establish the sociological context within which key communicators in Thailand operate, we will first present a brief description of the Thai social system. The method, results, and conclusions of this particular survey of the Thai communicators will then be described. Finally, we will point out similarities in characteristics of opinion leaders, influentials, and key communicators in Thailand and other countries where such research has been done.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE THAI SOCIAL SYSTEM[8]

Students of Thai society identify four strata based on income, education, modernity, and political power: the aristocracy, new elite, middle group, and lower group. The Thai view society in terms of status differences between individuals rather than of social class.

The highly educated aristocracy cultivate Thai cultural traditions; they take pride in their Western learning and see themselves as cultural mediators between Thailand and the West. They have some political influence but little economic power. Some of the aristocracy are accepting advisory positions in government and private industry where their names lend prestige. A few hold high official posts in the government.

Ranking below the aristocracy in social terms but overshadowing it in wealth and political power, the new elite comprises high-

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

[4] Everett M. Rogers and D. G. Cartano, "Methods of Measuring Opinion Leadership," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 26 (1962), pp. 435-441.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 435.

[6] Our purpose in conducting this research was to explore as completely as possible, within the many restraints of field research in a foreign culture, the process of communication without making a priori assumptions about the importance of leadership, influence, and other aspects of the process. Therefore, we have chosen to use the term "key communicators" which is more general and neutral than those used by other researchers. It is not our intention here to add another term to the jargon but rather to avoid misusing precisely defined existing terms.

[7] For reviews of such studies, see Katz, *op. cit.*; Rogers and Cartano, *op. cit.*

[8] Foreign Areas Studies Division, *U. S. Army Handbook for Thailand* (Washington, D. C.: Special Operations Research Office, 1963).

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ranking civil and military officials, leading businessmen, and prominent persons in the professions. Less self-consciously traditional than the aristocracy, the elite has borrowed extensively from the West, in personal taste as well as in knowledge. The barriers between Thai and Chinese have broken down more within this group than in any other, and many high-level Thai government officials have entered into business alliances with wealthy Chinese merchants.

Just below the elite is the middle group which divides further into upper and lower segments. The upper-middle segment is made up of a sizable group of Chinese businessmen, Thai civil servants, and professional people; it is within this segment that the cultural differences between Thai and Chinese are most obvious. The Thai in this group are government clerks, teachers, newspapermen, secretaries, and the like. They take their social standards from the elite, on whose continuing favor many of their positions depend, and they aspire to elite status. The lower-middle segment, made up of skilled laborers, artisans, technicians, workers in service industries, and the lowest paid government workers, tend to pattern themselves on their counterparts just above them.

At the bottom of the urban social scale are the large numbers of unskilled laborers, domestic servants, and vendors. It is doubtful that any strong sense of shared interest exists within this lower group.

Standing apart from the secular stratification is the large and important religious hierarchy, the Brotherhood of Monks (SANGKHA), whose members share a special status. Their saffron robes symbolize their role as exemplars and transmitters of "dharma," the truth taught by Buddha. Monks receive deference and signs of respect even from the king, who is above all others in the secular system.

The Thai carry the hierarchical ranking of individuals very far; finer and finer distinctions are made as socioeconomic differences diminish. Except among persons of the same age and background who have grown up together and have not achieved different social status, there is rarely true equality between individuals. Even in such cases, slight age differences will give dominance to one of them. One always looks for signs of status differences on meeting a stranger in order to have guidance for proper behavior in the relationship.

In this study, we are attempting to locate and to describe the key communicators within the Thai society. The occupations we have selected fall mainly in the new elite and middle group. It is quite possible that the merchants range from prosperous owners to street vendors. However, we can only legitimately classify our respondents by occupation; a really intensive examination of actors involved in Thai social dynamics must take into account the status differences within occupations as well as the status differences resulting from occupational affiliations themselves.

METHOD

Sampling

Four major cities in Thailand—Bangkok, Chiengmai, Ubol, and Pattani—were chosen to represent urban Thailand. In each of these cities, interviewers were instructed to obtain, by quota sampling, a number of interviews from men who were hypothesized to be key communicators. The variable or descriptor that seemed the most significant a priori was occupation. The following breakdown presents the numbers of interviews successfully completed in each of the designated occupations:

Government officials	39
Merchants	44
Military	162
Teachers	47
Monks	55
Professionals	16
Total	363

Since quota rather than probability sampling was used and the data from the four cities were combined, the inferences that can be drawn from this study should be made with caution.

The Questionnaire

The data collection was made uniform by means of a Thai-language structured questionnaire which included both precoded and open-end questions. All questions were designed to

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be as simple as possible; attitude and opinion questions were avoided. Of the 42 questions in the questionnaire, the following nine were deemed most pertinent to the purposes of this paper:

1. What is your age (in years)?
2. How many years of school have you completed?
3. Have you heard about any important events that occurred outside of Thailand?
4. How often during the past week did you listen to the radio?
5. How often did you read a newspaper last week?
6. Do you ever read or look at magazines?
7. Are there any people (whom you know) who consider *you* a reliable source of news?
8. About how many people do you talk to in any one day?
9. In the last six months, were there persons who sought *you* out in order to discuss their serious personal problems with you?

Interviewing

In all four cities, Thai university students and school teachers were trained to conduct interviews with the structured questionnaire. The training of interviewers and the execution of the field work was carried out by the Coordination Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Bangkok. Ten percent of the reported interviews were verified. Where no response to a question was given, the interviewer was allowed to repeat the question in a slightly modified form. Where questions had precoded alternatives, interviewers were instructed to fit the interviewee's spontaneous responses into the precodes; reading the precodes to the interviewees was ruled out. Open-end responses were recorded verbatim. The field work was conducted between January and May 1962.

Analysis

The responses to the demographic questions on age and education were converted into arithmetic means (for each of the occupations), which were then arranged in rank order. The responses to the questions about exposure to the mass media, about being reliable source of news and advice-givers, about awareness of foreign news, and about the extent of daily contacts with persons were put in percentage form (for each of the occupations) which were then accordingly rank ordered.

The present study of communications in Thailand used the self-designating technique[9] by asking respondents two questions: (1) "In the last six months, were there persons who sought you out in order to discuss their serious problems with you?" (2) "Are there any people whom you know who consider you a reliable source of news?" In other parts of the Thai study, the sociometric technique[10] was also used; this will be reported in a subsequent paper.

Briefly, the nine variables have been rank ordered according to the responses of the six

[9] Rogers and Cartano, (*op. cit.*, pp. 438-439) identified three main methods of measuring opinion leadership: the sociometric; the "key informants"; and the self-designating techniques.

[10] In the sociometric technique, members of a group are asked to whom they go for advice and information about an issue. Key informants in a social system are chosen by a researcher and are asked to point out the opinion leaders. In the self-designating technique, a respondent is asked a number of questions to determine to what extent he thinks of himself as an opinion leader. (*Ibid.*, p. 439) Some scholars have found positive correlations between the scores derived from the sociometric and from the self-designating methods. (*Ibid.*, p. 440)

The following are some of the more important studies utilizing the sociometric techniques in the identification of the "opinion leader": Merton in the Rovere study (R. K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* [Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1957], chap. 10), investigated voting in a small New Jersey town. He defined opinion leaders as those persons who were designated as influentials by at least four out of 86 respondents. Merton, as well as Katz and Lazarsfeld in their Decatur study, (Elihu Katz and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications* [Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1955]) used both the sociometric and the self-designating techniques. James Coleman, Elihu Katz, and Herbert Menzel ("The Diffusion of an Innovation Among Physicians," *Sociometry*, 20 [1957], pp. 253-270) utilized the sociometric technique.

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TABLE 1. RANK ORDER* OF CHARACTERISTICS OF KEY COMMUNICATORS BY OCCUPATION

Occupations	Characteristics									
	Age	Education	Awareness of foreign news	Radio listening	Newspaper reading	Magazine reading	Being a reliable source of news	Number of daily contacts	Advice-giving	Criterion: normalized ranks
Monks	5.5	5	3	6	6	5.5	4	3	5.5	6
Professionals	2	6	6	4	4	4	6	5	5.5	5
Military	1	4	5	5	5	5.5	5	1	3.5	4
Government Officials	3	3	4	1	2	3	3	2	3.5	3
Teachers	5.5	1	1	2	1	2	2	6	2	2
Merchants	4	2	2	3	3	1	1	4	1	1

$r_{\bar{x}\bar{x}}$ (reliability of ranks)† = .783

*Rank 6 indicates high

†A. L. Edwards, *Statistical Methods for the Behavioral Sciences* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1959), pp. 403-413.

occupations included in this study; all of these variables have been correlated with one another utilizing the rank order correlation technique. The normalized rank solution, as suggested by Guilford,[11] made it possible to obtain the relative ranking of each of the six occupations as determined by the summative effect of each of the nine variables. Persons belonging to occupations ranking high would be considered the optimum candidates for the classification and functions of key communicators; the reverse would be the case for those occupations which ranked low. The normalized ranks will be considered the overall criterion of the concept of the key communicator. Intercorrelational analysis between this criterion and the nine variables was also carried out to determine the relative importance of each variable.

RESULTS

Early in the paper, we stated the questions which the research must answer: (1) Among the occupations studied in Thailand, which ones fulfill the definition of key communicator most adequately? (2) How do certain variables contribute to key communicative behavior? To answer the first question, the reader must refer to Table 1. Here, by means of Guilford's[12] normalized ranks, we find that monks, professionals, and the military fulfill the definition of key communicator to a greater degree than government officials, teachers, and merchants. The monks rank high on all the characteristics except number of daily contracts, being a reliable source of news, and awareness of foreign news (about countries surrounding Thailand).[13] On the other hand, merchants comprise the lowest ranked occupation on all the characteristics except number of daily contacts and age.

The second question requires the use of Table 2, which is a matrix of correlations among the various characteristics and between these characteristics and "Z," the composite criterion of the key communicator. The discussion of these characteristics is accomplished in three stages: (1) the demographic characteristics of age and education, (2) the exposure to the mass media which includes the characteristics of awareness of foreign news, (3) the word-of-mouth behavioral characteristics of being a reliable source of news, being an advice-giver, and the number of daily contacts with other persons.

Demographic Characteristics

Age does not seem to be an important characteristic of the key communicator since it

[11] J. P. Guilford, *Psychometric Methods* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1954), pp. 179-182.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Mainland China, Malayan Federation, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Taiwan were the countries specified.

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TABLE 2. INTERCORRELATIONS BETWEEN CHARACTERISTICS AND THE CRITERION OF KEY COMMUNICATIVE BEHAVIOR

Characteristics	Age	Education	Awareness of foreign news	Radio listening	Newspaper reading	Magazine reading	Being a reliable source of news	Number of daily contacts	Advice-giving	Criterion: normalized ranks
Age	X	−.414	−.814	−.071	−.214	−.300	−.585	.471	−.142	−.214
Education		X	.829	.657	.772	.757	.886	−.257	.914	.886
Awareness of foreign news			X	.314	.486	.614	.886	−.429	.686	.600
Radio listening				X	.943	.757	.543	−.257	.571	.714
Newspaper reading					X	.814	.600	−.485	.657	.771
Magazine reading						X	.814	−.529	.814	.900
Being a reliable source of news							X	−.257	.857	.829
Number of daily contacts								X	−.142	−.257
Advice-giving									X	.971
Criterion: normalized ranks										X

Significance Values, n=6
.10 = .622
.05 = .707
.02 = .789
.01 = .834

correlates −.214 with the overall criterion; its only significant correlation is with awareness of foreign news where the *rho* is −.814 indicating that younger members of the occupations studied are more likely to be aware of foreign news than older members. On the other hand, education is a highly important characteristic since its correlation with the criterion is +.886. Education has strong positive relationships with the mass media characteristics and with all the word-of-mouth characteristics except the number of daily contacts.

Mass Media Characteristics

The degree of exposure to the mass media is very important to being a key communicator in Thailand. The mass media characteristics of magazine reading, frequency of newspaper reading, and frequency of radio listening, in that order, correlate positively with the overall criterion. The characteristic, awareness of foreign news (included since most of the information about the countries surrounding Thailand comes from the mass media), does not correlate as highly with the criterion as do the other mass media characteristics. The critical demographic characteristic—education—correlates well with the three mass media characteristics, particularly with those that involve the ability to read; the highest correlation between education and the mass media characteristics is that with awareness of foreign news.

Word-of-Mouth Characteristics

This aspect of the study allows speculation about the flow of information from the mass media into the interpersonal networks of Thai society. Both being an advice-giver (*rho* = +.971) and being a reliable source of news (*rho* = +.829) show imposing positive relationships with the criterion; the number of daily contacts does not provide a significant correlation. The word-of-mouth characteristics correlate more highly with the mass media characteristics involving reading than with radio listening; this is reflected in that word-of-mouth characteristics also correlate with education. Awareness of foreign news also seems to correlate with being a reliable source of news and an advice-giver.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Before comparing our findings in Thailand with those of studies on opinion leaders in other countries, a brief recapitulation of the Thai study should be helpful. Among the six occu-

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pations studied, we found that monks, professionals, and the military fulfilled our original definition of key communicator more adequately than government officials, teachers, and merchants. As far as the characteristics that make up the definition of key communicator are concerned, we find that education, heavy exposure to the mass media (especially the printed media), and responsible roles in word-of-mouth communication are more important than the other characteristics. The characteristic, "awareness of foreign news," although not as critical as those just mentioned, correlates highly with education in a positive direction and with age in a negative direction. That is, the better educated and the younger members of these occupations are more aware of foreign news than the less educated and older members.

It would be immodest to claim that the study of key communicators in Thailand is unique. There have been studies on opinion leaders in other countries which have contributed to our knowledge of informal communication. Comparative data on some other studies as well as data from our Thai study, are presented in brief tabular form in Table 3.

Though the techniques used in identifying the opinion leader have varied, there is great agreement upon the characteristics of these individuals in different societies. There has

TABLE 3. SIMILARITIES AMONG THE KEY COMMUNICATORS AND OPINION LEADERS IN SEVEN COUNTRIES

Countries Where Studies Were Done	Characteristics*				
	Method	Concept	Demographic	Word-of-Mouth	Mass Media
Thailand	Self-designating	"Key Communicators"	High education, Young	Advice-givers, low number of daily contacts	High exposure to the mass media
Egypt[a]	Sociometric	"Transmitters"	Literate, Young	Low number of daily contacts	High exposure to the mass media
Greece[b]	Key information	"Opinion Leaders"	High education	Evaluates and interprets mass media information	High exposure to the mass media
Sweden[c]	Sociometric	"Opinion Influentials"	High education	Opinion molders, political advice-givers, frequent political contacts	High exposure to the mass media
India[d]	Sociometric and self-designating	"Opinion Leaders"	Literate, Learned	Advice givers, interpret current events	Read newspapers
Israel[e]	Sociometric	"Opinion Leaders"	Younger, Teachers	Pass on external news	Read newspapers and listen to radio
U.S.[f] (Rovere Study)	Sociometric	"Influentials"	"Cosmopolitans" have more education and are younger than "Locals."	Advice-givers, influence decisions	National magazines used to interpret events

A summary table like the one above can, of course, only bring out the highlights of the studies as they pertain to the categories discussed. The interested reader may consult the original studies listed below for detailed findings.

[a] Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, "The Mass Media & Egyptian Village Life," *Social Forces*, 42 (1963), pp. 97-103.

[b] J. Mayone Stycos, "Patterns of Communication in a Rural Greek Village," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 16 (1952), pp. 59-70.

[c] Bo Anderson, "Opinion Influentials and Political Opinion Formation in Four Swedish Communities," *International Social Science Journal*, 14 (1962), pp. 320-336.

[d] Robert T. Bower, *Communication of Ideas in India—Part III: Communications and the Background of Opinion in the Village* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Social Science Research, 1954).

[e] S. N. Eisenstadt, "Some Problems of Communication Research in Israel," *International Social Science Journal*, 14 (1962), pp. 337-348; by the same author: "Communication Processes Among Immigrants in Israel," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 16 (1952), p. 42-58; "Conditions of Communicative Receptivity," *ibid.*, 17 (1953), p. 363-374; and "Communication Systems and Social Structure; An Exploratory Comparative Study," *ibid.*, 19 (1955), p. 153-167.

[f] R. K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1957), chap. 10.

*The characteristics above must always be viewed in their relative sense; high education means that the "opinion leaders" and "key communicators" are relatively more educated than their followers, young means that they are relatively younger than their followers, etc.

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been considerable research on opinion leaders in the United States; we have chosen Merton's classical study to provide at least one source on U.S. data. The most consistent patterns emerging from the paradigm (Table 3) are (1) that opinion leaders tend to be more highly educated than their "followers" and (2) they tend to be relatively more exposed to the mass media.

Some important considerations derived from the six studies on opinion leaders could not be fitted into the tabular presentation. In the Greek study, Stycos suggests, "not only do they form a bridge between the written mass media and the illiterate population, but in the process of passing on this information they are expected to evaluate it."[14] Similar conclusions may be derived from the other studies cited (See Table 3). The Rovere study (U.S.), Israel, and India studies have in common the use of Merton's concepts of polymorphic and monomorphic influentials. Rogers and Cartano feel "that in traditional societies, opinion leaders may be more likely to be polymorphic as in such societies there is less separation of roles than in more modern societies."[15] Both the Indian and Israel studies confirm Rogers' and Cartano's position; in traditional villages, opinion leaders tend to be polymorphic, while in communities ranging from transitional to modern communities they are increasingly monomorphic.

This study of the key communicator in Thailand adds to the growing field of communication studies, particularly to those that attempt to delineate the key communicators or similar types of persons in different cultural and national contexts. In comparing our Thai results with studies of other societies, we have reported the major similarities that characterize the activists in the communication network.

[14] J. Mayone Stycos, "Patterns of Communication in a Rural Greek Village," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 16 (1952), p. 60.

[15] Rogers and Cartano, *op. cit.*, p. 437.

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE*

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ABSTRACT

Social contact networks are offered as a "language" for making social participation an aspect of social structure. An effort is made to set forth an orderly set of network characteristics—how they are formed and utilized and how they may be used for cross-cultural studies. To avoid the charge of merely offering a translation scheme into a new jargon a number of specific hypotheses are offered—hypotheses that are outgrowths of this particular "language."

The guiding thesis is that ego's social networks indicate the scope of his participation in his society. And, conversely, that existing social networks provide a clue to the strands which actually hold a society together.

Social structure may be thought of as the ". . . network of actually existing social relations."[1]

In his 1964 presidential address George Homans expressed dissatisfaction with much present-day sociological theory. He pleaded that sociologists bring the individual back into sociological focus. There doubtless exist many reasons for this dissatisfaction. There are conceptual gaps between micro-sociologists and macro-sociologists and between normative

* On a previous draft of this paper Harumi Befu collaborated with the author. I should like to acknowledge assistance from Dr. Befu, and from Bill Harrell, H. Clyde Wilson, and Paul C. Rosenblatt.

[1] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (London: Cohen and West, 1952), p. 190.

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